

Breakdown of an executive assistant

A survival guide for office dwellers

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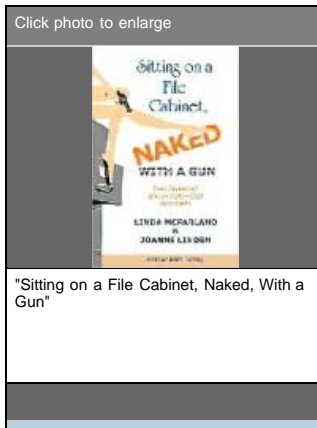
Admittedly, the night before, she was visibly stressed. The executive assistant to the CEO of a Silicon Valley corporation, she was excellent at her job, except when it came to drawing boundaries, to delegating, to saying no. The result was a frenzied woman with a sharp tongue and a short fuse, in a perpetual state of near nervous breakdown. Usually, she recovered.

The first to arrive and the last to leave, her colleagues got used to her perpetual presence. At least she always had on a fresh face and change of clothes come morning. But this time, as the CEO returned to his office, he found she had never gone home. And this time, she was sitting on a file cabinet, naked, with a gun.

Perhaps it was the story, or maybe it was just the situation that inspired veteran executive assistants Linda McFarland and Joanne Linden to write a book. If nothing else, the story gave them a buzz phrase for the moments when their own stress levels peaked on the job. "I'm heading for the file cabinet," one would say. "Do you still have your clothes on?" And the pressure would dissipate into laughter.

With their collective experience of assisting executives and teaching others who do, the friends decided they really did have a book inside them that might shed light, or at least offer alternative ammunition, to those entrenched in the complex profession of doing what it takes to help top-tier professionals be successful.

The result is "Sitting on a File Cabinet, Naked, With a Gun,"



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a quick, accessible, 120 pages of allegorical short stories collected and authored by McFarland and Linden, with editor Sharon Turnoy. The authors spent two years interviewing CEO assistants and collecting their stories of struggle and success as they face the daily challenges of supporting people of power. At the end of it all, they had produced 27 brief chapters, each of which begins with a clever if not cliché title, followed by a one-sentence synopsis of the chapter, and an inspirational quote. After the story plays out, the chapter ends with POW!, or points of wisdom, intended to help the reader take away the message and apply it to their own life.

"Our best advice," said Linden, "is to know you are not alone. Many administrative professionals out there want to be a better business partner with their executive. Find

mentors, read articles and take classes. Don't be afraid to go the extra mile. Step out of your comfort zone and improve your skills. It just takes a network of supportive people, a strong desire and some specific goals."

Thursday, April 8, sponsors Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, Embassy Suites Monterey Bay and PlanetAdmin, the authors' own executive assistant training company, will give McFarland and Linden an opportunity to share additional points of wisdom to a local audience. Hosted at Embassy Suites in Seaside, the authors will read some of their "True Stories of Silicon Valley CEO Assistants," creating teaching moments in the message. The event promises to be a night of networking, socializing, book signing and fun.

"My interest in bringing Joanne and Linda to our community is the expertise and experiences they have brought to the Silicon Valley administrative professionals, and especially women," said Alicia Molina, senior administrative assistant at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula. "Linda and Joanne so clearly demonstrate how the power of networking and the support of other professional women help them do more to further their personal and professional lives."

Both McFarland and Linden have spent more than 30 years as executive assistants in start-up and billion-dollar corporations. After working for nine different CEOs, McFarland says she has mastered her "never-panic-under-fire" demeanor. McFarland is a co-founder of the Silicon Valley Catalysts Association, a group of CEO assistants, of which both authors are members. Both guest lecture for the UC Santa Cruz Extension in Silicon Valley and are senior partners at PlanetAdmin, which provides consulting and training for administrative professionals.

"When Linda invited me to co-author this book," said Linden, "I said, 'I think you're crazy. What do I know about

writing a book?' I told my husband it was crazy, too, but he said he thought it was wonderful, and he'd help. What we didn't know about writing a book, we learned. What we know about the life of an executive assistant is based on 30 years' experience."

If you go -What:"Sitting on a File Cabinet, Naked, with a Gun" book signing and reading -Where: Embassy Suites Monterey Bay Hotel, 1441 Canyon Del Rey Blvd., Seaside -When:April 8, 5:30 to 7:30p.m. -Cost:Free -Contact: adminprofessionals @chomp.org or 625-4515, ext.1500

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